

# Neutral dinuclear copper(I)-NHC complexes: synthesis and application in the hydrosilylation of ketones

Michael Trose,<sup>a</sup> Faïma Lazreg,<sup>a</sup> Tao Chang,<sup>a</sup> Fady Nahra,<sup>b</sup> David B. Cordes,<sup>a</sup> Alexandra M. Z. Slawin<sup>a</sup> and Catherine S. J. Cazin<sup>a,b\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>EaStCHEM School of Chemistry, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, KY16 9ST (UK)

<sup>b</sup>Ghent University, Department of Inorganic and Physical Chemistry, Krijgslaan 281, S-3, B-9000 Ghent, Belgium

**KEYWORDS** *N*-Heterocyclic carbenes, Copper(I), Hydrosilylation, Ketones, dinuclear

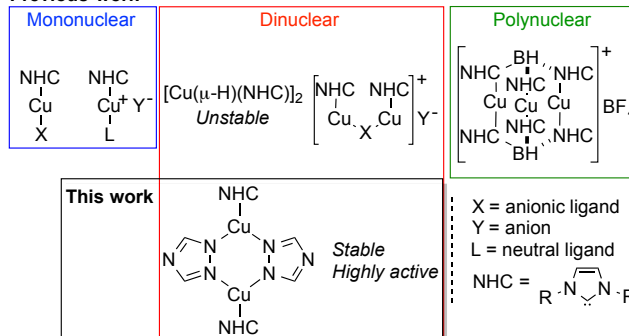
## Supporting Information Placeholder

**ABSTRACT:** The synthesis of a class of highly stable neutral dinuclear Cu(I)-NHC complexes using 1,2,4-triazole as a bridging ligand is described. Various NHCs were used to generate a library of  $[\text{Cu}(\mu\text{-trz})(\text{NHC})_2]$  complexes. Interestingly,  $[\text{Cu}(\mu\text{-trz})(\text{IPr})_2]$  was found to be highly active in the hydrosilylation of ketones, without the need of an external base or of any other additive. A wide range of aryl and alkyl ketones, as well as sterically hindered ketones, were successfully reduced to alcohols using the lowest catalyst loading reported to date.

In the last decade, copper-NHC complexes have been heavily studied and employed in catalysis.<sup>1</sup> In this synthetic exploration effort, mostly mononuclear complexes, both neutral and cationic, are reported. Dinuclear complexes with bridging or chelating ligands are also found in the literature although in significantly smaller numbers. Among those that have been reported, cationic complexes are usually formed by two copper(I) NHC fragments bridged by an anionic ligand such as hydride,<sup>2</sup> fluoride,<sup>3</sup> alkenyl<sup>4a</sup> and boryl<sup>4b</sup> with a general formula  $[\text{Cu}_2(\mu\text{-X})(\text{NHC})_2]\text{Y}$  (Figure 1). Neutral species are more scarce with only two known examples,<sup>5</sup> one of which is the highly unstable copper hydride, reported by Sadighi and co-workers.<sup>5a</sup> The latter proved highly unstable when conventional 5-membered NHCs were used, however, recently, increased stability of related complexes was achieved by using expanded-ring NHCs,<sup>6</sup> or highly donating cyclic alkylaminocarbene (CAAC) ligands.<sup>7</sup> Examples of polynuclear complexes (presenting three or more copper centers) are rare and obtained using multidentate NHC ligands.<sup>8</sup> Despite recent advances in the use of non-conventional NHC ligands,<sup>9</sup> the 5-membered NHCs based on the imidazolium core are still the most widely studied and the most readily available. Noting the significant difference in catalytic efficiency between the mononuclear cationic copper complexes,  $[\text{Cu}(\text{NHC})_2]\text{Y}$ , and its neutral relatives,  $[\text{Cu}(\text{X})(\text{NHC})]$ ,<sup>10</sup> we sought to synthesize stable neutral dinuclear copper-NHC complexes bearing conventional 5-membered NHC ligands and to evaluate their reactivity in known copper-catalyzed transformations (Figure 1). In order to achieve the isolation of neutral dinuclear complexes, 1,2,4-triazole **1** (**Htrz**) was selected for its ability to coordinate two adjacent copper centers. **Htrz** and its corresponding triazolate anion (**trz**) have been widely used for this bridging task.<sup>11</sup> However, only one example of a well-defined neutral dinuclear copper (I) complex, bearing triphenylphosphine

as ligand, has been reported to date.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that these authors did not report their use in catalysis but simply their synthesis.

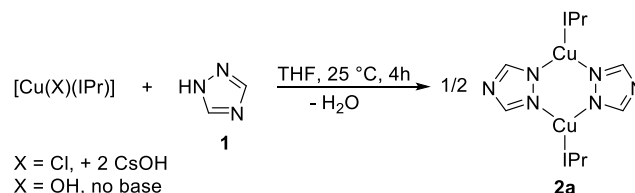
### Previous work



**Figure 1.** Previous work describing mono-, di- and tri-nuclear copper-NHC complexes and details of the present report on dinuclear complexes.

In order to synthesize the desired complexes,  $[\text{Cu}(\text{Cl})(\text{IPr})]$ <sup>13</sup> (IPr = *N,N'*-bis[2,6-(di-iso-propyl)phenyl]imidazole-2-ylidene)) was used as benchmark reagent in initial synthetic efforts (Scheme 1). When this complex was reacted with **1** at room temperature in THF, no reaction was observed; whereas the addition of CsOH leads to complete formation of the desired  $[\text{Cu}(\mu\text{-trz})(\text{IPr})_2]$  **2a**.  $[\text{Cu}(\text{OH})(\text{IPr})]$ <sup>14</sup> was also reacted with **1**, in the absence of CsOH, to yield **2a** as expected, revealing that the copper-NHC hydroxide species might be an intermediate in the initial reaction.

### Scheme 1. Synthesis of **2a** from various copper-NHC precursors.



Considering  $[\text{Cu}(\text{Cl})(\text{NHC})]$  complexes are easily accessed and isolated, with regard to the corresponding  $[\text{Cu}(\text{OH})(\text{NHC})]$  ana-

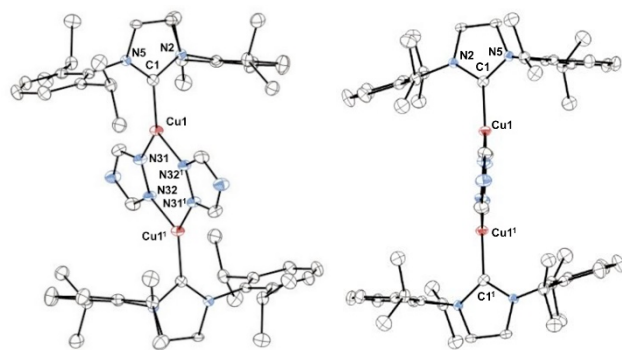
logues, we opted, for the sake of simplicity, to target the *in situ* generation of the hydroxides. Gratifyingly, various  $[\text{Cu}(\mu\text{-trz})(\text{NHC})]_2$  were obtained in excellent yields using this strategy (Table 1). Additionally, the purification of the product proved straightforward since excess of **Htrz** and CsOH can be removed by simple filtration through Celite. Both aromatic (Table 1, entries 1-3) and aliphatic substituents (Table 1, entries 4 and 5) on the nitrogens of the NHC are well tolerated, giving the desired complexes in high yields. Whereas **2a** and **2b** are soluble in THF, **2c-2d** proved insoluble in this solvent and  $\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$  had to be used instead. In addition, the scaling up of **2a-2c** to 1 gram was achieved without any issue. These complexes are air stable in the solid-state.<sup>15</sup>

**Table 1. Synthesis of  $[\text{Cu}(\mu\text{-trz})(\text{NHC})]_2$  complexes.<sup>a</sup>**

$[\text{Cu}(\text{Cl})(\text{NHC})] + 2 \text{CsOH} + \text{HN} \begin{array}{c} \diagup \text{N} \\ \diagdown \text{N} \end{array} \xrightarrow[\text{- CsCl, - H}_2\text{O}]{\text{THF, 25 }^\circ\text{C, 4h}} \frac{1}{2} \begin{array}{c} \text{NHC} \\   \\ \text{Cu} \\   \\ \text{N} \end{array} \begin{array}{c} \diagup \text{N} \\ \diagdown \text{N} \end{array}$					
Entry	NHC	solvent	$[\text{Cu}(\mu\text{-trz})(\text{NHC})]_2$	Yield (%) <sup>b</sup>	
1	IPr	THF	NHC = IPr ( <b>2a</b> )	90 (92) <sup>c</sup>	
2	IMes	THF	NHC = IMes ( <b>2b</b> )	93 (97) <sup>c</sup>	
3	SIMes	$\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$	NHC = SIMes ( <b>2c</b> )	92 (95) <sup>c</sup>	
4	<i>i</i> Bu	$\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$	NHC = <i>i</i> Bu ( <b>2d</b> )	91	
5	ICy	$\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$	NHC = ICy ( <b>2e</b> )	89	

<sup>a</sup> Reaction conditions:  $[\text{Cu}(\text{Cl})(\text{NHC})]$  (100 mg), **1** (1.1 equiv.), CsOH (2.0 equiv.), solvent (2 mL), 25 °C, 4h, under argon. <sup>b</sup> Isolated yield. <sup>c</sup> Large scale (1g) isolated yield.

X-ray analysis of **2a** confirmed the expected structure, as shown in Figure 2. All other complexes were fully characterized and their structure was confirmed by X-ray diffraction on single crystal (see Supporting Information).<sup>16</sup>



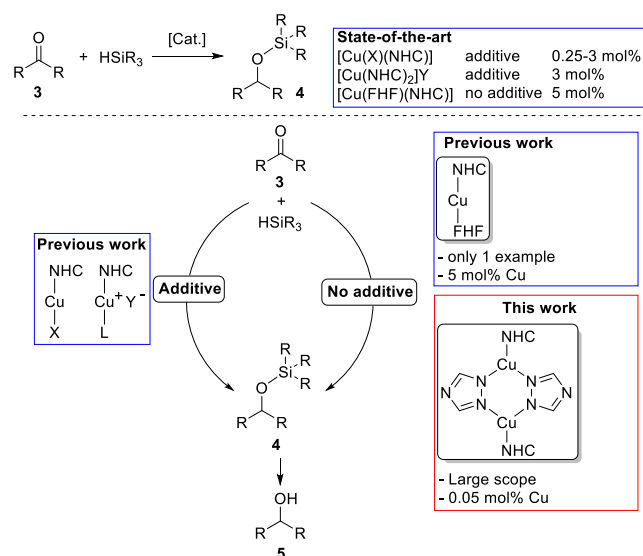
**Figure 2.** Two views of the molecular structure of **2a**. Solvent molecules and H atoms omitted for clarity. Thermal ellipsoids are shown at 50% probability.<sup>16</sup> Selected bond lengths (Å), angles (°) and torsion angles (°): Cu1-C1 = 1.896(2); Cu1-N32<sup>1</sup> = 1.964(2); Cu1-N31 = 2.001(2); N32<sup>1</sup>-Cu1-C1 = 134.57(10); N31-Cu1-C1 = 119.15(10); N31-Cu1-N32<sup>1</sup> = 106.17(9); C1-Cu1-Cu1<sup>1</sup> = 170.22(7); N31-Cu1-C1-N2 = -76.7(2); N32<sup>1</sup>-Cu1-C1-N2 = 98.9(2); N31-Cu1-C1-N5 = 99.3(2); N32<sup>1</sup>-Cu1-C1-N5 = -85.0(2); Cu1-N31-N32-Cu1<sup>1</sup> = 5.4(2); N31-Cu1-N32<sup>1</sup>-N31<sup>1</sup> = 4.37(15); N32<sup>1</sup>-Cu1-N31-N32 = -4.59(16).<sup>16</sup>

**2a** displays a distorted trigonal geometry around each copper atom, displaying two different bond distances with the two nitrogens N31 and N32<sup>1</sup>. The same geometry and comparable bond distances are found in copper-NHC pyridyl-azolate complexes,

despite the latter showing a more distorted trigonal geometry compared to **2a**.<sup>17</sup> A distinctive feature in **2a** is the 6-membered ring formed by the four nitrogens of the two triazolate bridging ligands and the two copper atoms, the latter being separated by a distance of 3.7687(11) Å. Analysing the torsion angles of this ring, an almost flat conformation was found; moreover the ring is practically perpendicular to the NHC-Cu-Cu-NHC plane, most likely to minimize steric repulsions. These characteristics were found in all other complexes (**2b-2e**) with a different degree of distortion caused by the steric demand of the NHC ligand (%*V*<sub>Bur</sub>),<sup>18</sup> mainly evidenced by the deviation in linearity of the Cu1<sup>1</sup>-Cu1-C1 torsional angle such as in **2d** (C1-Cu1-Cu1<sup>1</sup>=161.76(4), see Supporting Information, Figure S6).

Interested in the applications of these dimers in catalysis, we sought to compare their performance with the corresponding mononuclear copper-NHC complexes in a well-studied reaction. We hoped that the bridging triazolate could act as an internal base, thus avoiding the use of any external additives. Among the various transformations catalysed by copper-NHC species, in which a base is typically needed,<sup>19</sup> the hydrosilylation of ketones was selected as a model reaction (Scheme 2).

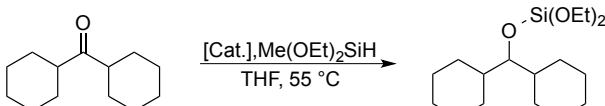
**Scheme 2. Cu-NHC catalysts for the hydrosilylation of ketones.**<sup>20-23</sup>



Nolan and co-workers reported that the neutral complexes  $[\text{Cu}(\text{Cl})(\text{ICy})]$  or  $[\text{Cu}(\text{Cl})(\text{SIMes})]$  and the cationic  $[\text{Cu}(\text{ICy})_2]\text{BF}_4$  or  $[\text{Cu}(\text{IPr})_2]\text{BF}_4$  were able to promote this transformation using 3 mol% of catalyst with a sub-stoichiometric amount of base (3-12 mol% of NaO*t*Bu).<sup>20</sup> The authors proposed an initial activation of the copper precatalyst by the base, forming *in situ* the corresponding  $[\text{Cu}(\text{O}^i\text{Bu})(\text{NHC})]$  species, which, upon reacting with the silane, generated the  $[\text{Cu}(\text{H})(\text{NHC})]$  intermediate involved in the hydrosilylation.<sup>20a,c</sup> Noticing that both the chloride and the cationic NHC complexes were not able to react directly with the silane to give the intermediate copper hydride species, the use of a *tert*-butoxide base proved necessary. Later on, using both kinetic and computational studies, it was shown that the base activates both pre-catalyst and silane, forming a hypervalent silicon species. The latter permitted a better hydride transfer to copper, generating the copper hydride needed for the hydrosilylation to proceed.<sup>21</sup> Recently, other methodologies have been reported using different  $[\text{Cu}(\text{Cl})(\text{NHC})]$  complexes, exclusively based on the fine-tuning of the NHC ligand, but without overcoming the need for a significant amount of base.<sup>22</sup> To date, the only copper(I)-NHC precatalyst able to perform this reaction without the use of any external base are the copper bifluoride complexes  $[\text{Cu}(\text{HF}_2)(\text{NHC})]$ ,

used exclusively for the hydrosilylation of benzyl acetone.<sup>23</sup> In this case, F<sup>-</sup> acts as an internal base. It should be mentioned that **Htrz** possesses a comparable acidity ( $pK_a = 14.8$ , in DMSO) to HF ( $pK_a = 15$ , in DMSO), which suggests that the triazolate anion can also act as an internal base. For these reasons, the dinuclear copper complexes  $[\text{Cu}(\mu\text{-trz})(\text{NHC})]_2$  were tested in this reaction, using the hindered dicyclohexylketone **3a** as model substrate (Table 2). All complexes bearing aromatic substituents on the nitrogens of the NHC **2a-2c** showed high activity (Table 2, entries 1-3), whereas the ones bearing aliphatic substituents **2d-2e** were not active under these conditions (Table 2, entries 4 and 5). Among these catalysts, **2a** proved the most active and was chosen for further optimization. Surprisingly, reducing the catalyst loading to 0.05 mol% did not affect the catalytic activity of **2a**, converting **3a** in 2 h into the corresponding silylether (Table 2, entry 7). Under these conditions, **2a** is the most efficient catalyst of all the copper-NHC catalysts reported to date for this transformation (TON = 2000). Next, the amount of silane was reduced to 1.1 equiv. without any loss in efficiency (Table 2, entry 9). Using these optimized conditions followed by a deprotection with TBAF, **5a** was isolated in excellent yield (Scheme 3, method A).

**Table 2. Synthesis of  $[\text{Cu}(\mu\text{-trz})(\text{NHC})]_2$  complexes.<sup>a</sup>**

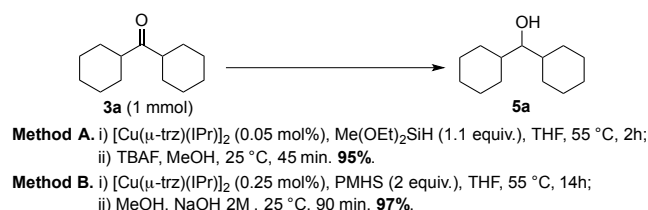
					
Entry	Catalyst	Loading (mol%)	Silane (equiv.)	Time (h)	Conv. <sup>b</sup> (%)
1	<b>2a</b>	1	2	0.75	>99
2	<b>2b</b>	1	2	0.75	95
3	<b>2c</b>	1	2	0.75	84
4	<b>2d</b>	1	2	0.75	0
5	<b>2e</b>	1	2	0.75	5
6	<b>2a</b>	0.05	1.5	0.75	85
7	<b>2a</b>	0.05	1.5	2	>99
8	<b>2a</b>	0.01	1.5	2	0
9	<b>2a</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>&gt;99</b>
10 <sup>c</sup>	<b>2a</b>	0.05	1.1	4	72

<sup>a</sup> Reaction conditions: **3a** (0.5 mmol), Me(OEt)<sub>2</sub>SiH (0.55-1 mmol),  $[\text{Cu}(\mu\text{-trz})(\text{NHC})]_2$  (0.01-0.5 mol%), THF (0.75 mL), 55 °C, under argon. <sup>b</sup> Yield determined by GC, based on **3a**, average of two reactions. <sup>c</sup> 35 °C.

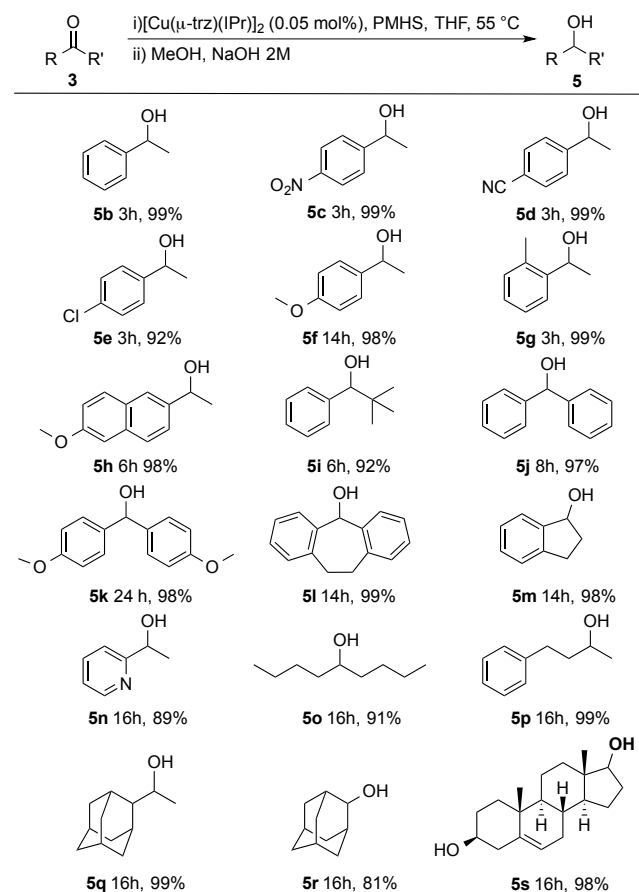
Despite these satisfactory results, we still wanted to use a less expensive and a more environmentally-friendly silane in lieu of Me(OEt)<sub>2</sub>SiH; for these reasons, the use of polymethylhydrosiloxane (PMHS) was investigated next. When PMHS was tested under the optimal conditions, no conversion was observed. However, by increasing the catalyst loading to 0.25 mol%, complete consumption of **3a** was achieved, showing the feasibility of using this environmentally friendly and safe hydride source. At this point, the deprotection and purification steps were altered; TBAF and flash chromatography were replaced by NaOH in methanol, followed by a simple extraction to remove siloxanes formed during the deprotection step (Scheme 3, method B). Interestingly, when the scope of the reaction was investigated using 0.05 mol% of **2a** and PMHS, a wide range of ketones were successfully converted into the corresponding alcohol after simple deprotection (Scheme 4). Acetophenone derivatives bearing, in the *para* position, both electron-withdrawing (EWG) **5c-5e** and

electron-donating (EDG) **5f** groups were well tolerated. The same tolerance was noted for the *ortho*-substituted **5g**. Following this trend in reactivity, a test using 4,4'-dimethoxybenzophenone, as a challenging substrate (electronically), showed that a longer reaction time was needed. Nevertheless full conversion into **5k** was achieved. Moreover, branched aliphatic substitutions on the  $\alpha$ -carbon of acetophenone ( $R'$  in scheme 4), such as a *tert*-butyl moiety, did not affect the yield (**5i**). Considering highly hindered aliphatic ketones, acyclic 5-nonanone **5o**, adamantone **5q** and 1-adamantylmethylketone **5r** were all successfully converted to the desired alcohols. Encouraged by these results, we tested the methodology on a more complex molecule, *i.e.* *trans*-androsterone. Gratifyingly, this steroid was fully converted to the corresponding alcohol **5s** in excellent yield, further demonstrating the robustness of this methodology. It should be mentioned that only one diastereoisomer of the product was observed in the last entry, suggesting that this method might be used in a diastereoselective manner.

**Scheme 3. Optimized procedures for the hydrosilylation of **3a** and its subsequent deprotection to yield **5a**.**



**Scheme 4. Hydrosilylation of ketones using **2a** and PMHS.**



Reaction conditions: i) **3** (1 mmol), PMHS (2 mmol),  $[\text{Cu}(\mu\text{-trz})(\text{IPr})]_2$  (0.05 mol%) THF (1.5 mL), 55 °C; ii) MeOH (1 mL), NaOH<sub>aq</sub> 2M (2 mL), 25 °C, 90 min.

In conclusion, a novel and highly stable family of neutral dinuclear Cu(I)-NHC complexes was synthesized and fully character-

ized. Among these complexes, **2a** was found to be the most efficient catalyst to date in the hydrosilylation of ketones, reducing a wide range of aryl and alkyl ketones to the corresponding alcohols without the use of any additive. The method was also successfully applied to hindered ketones, which are usually very difficult to reduce. Ongoing work in our laboratory focuses on the use of this novel family of complexes in related copper-catalysed transformations.

## ASSOCIATED CONTENT

### Supporting Information

Experimental details, characterization data, X-Ray crystallography data for **2a-2e**. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>.

## AUTHOR INFORMATION

### Corresponding Author

\*Catherine.Cazin@UGent.be

### Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interests.

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